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ABSTRACT

The future, more than any time in the past, will require of Chicanos a collective effort if they are to preserve their legacy of language and culture for their children. To prepare for the year 2001, Chicanos should be aware of future concerns and take action to address them. Chicanos could best realize national visibility and importance by identifying with the large Hispanic diaspora and by forging coalitions with other ethnic American groups. A promotion of research and development activities by Chicanos should be undertaken, and a Chicano center for the study of public policy should be established. Chicanos should develop their own communication system, a system that would include high-circulation newspapers and journals, as well as radio and television stations. Chicanos must now undertake the kinds of education and training that will prepare them for roles beyond that of teachers of bilingual education. A genuine grass roots Hispanic organization with a national voice must be established. The future must be contended with, for it will not go away; and, Chicanos must develop a system of skills that will make them functional existents of the time that is to come. (Author/DS)

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AMERICA O AZTLAN? LOS CHICANOS EN EL AÑO 2001

By Felipe de Ortego y Gasca

Aztlan

Statistics suggest that by the year 2001 the Hispanic population of the United States will have increased such that Hispanics will be the largest minority group in the country. At the moment, Hispanics are the largest minority group west of the Mississippi; the second largest east of that line. What do these statistics augur for Hispanic Americans? For Chicanos specifically? Does this population increase indicate strengthening ties with Mexico? Or does it mean a closer amalgam of the Chicano experience with the American experience? If a "cultural" solidarity with Mexico is pursued, will this alienate Anglo Americans and alarm them to the possibility of a Quebec situation in the Southwest? And if such solidarity actually accrues, against whom will Chicanos struggle? Will not that struggle be against a set of circumstances now external to the Chicano struggle?

A Syntactical Prognosis of Change

If ontology recapitulates phylogeny, we might postulate, then, that epistemology recapitulates etymology. What we know—or what we think we know—is based dialectically on the lexical structures of perception. In other words,

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reality may be what our language says it is. Let's examine this notion for a moment.

If we awake every morning with dread for the day, then the day will indeed be fraught with those encounters which reinforce the initial dread. Setting up the day with such comments as "Boy, it's a lousy day!" can tend to make the day lousy. Our language and the context that powers it affects our trajectory through time and space in ways we are only now becoming congizant of. The spate of works on eiconic behavior, speculative as they may be, point to correlations between thought and behavior. That is, that positive thoughts engender positive behavior. If one's self-image or self esteem is low, then one manifests a behavior which reveals what we think about ourselves. In turn--those behaviorists tell us--our interactions with people place us contextually in positions consistent with those thoughts about ourselves. If we think some people are better than we are, then interactionally we will transmit clues to that effect. Or if we think (and say) we are unable to do something, then introlexically we internalize that inability—oftentimes to our own detriment. Behavioral change is seen then as a function of thought and language. As our thoughts about ourselves improve, then our trajectory through time and space is

altered to reflect that improvement.

Truffles, Tantrums and Truths

It would be ludicrous to suggest that we can change our future simply by changing our thoughts about ourselves or by willing the future to be different! That's wishful thinking. The forces that influence our lives are very real. Poverty cannot be willed away by thinking of ourselves as rich. Hunger cannot be satiated by deluding ourselves that we have just eaten a large meal. Yet, both poverty and hunger can be overcome by motivations engendered out of the dynamics of poverty and hunger. These motivations may take any number of forms: from the personal desire to overcome poverty to crusading for the elimination of poverty or altruistic forms of philanthropy to help overcome poverty. None of these forms may in truth lessen the forces which affect our lives. What these forms may do, though, is alter the way we deal with those forces.

The Ordeal of Change

There are still people who have not caught up to the socio-technological changes of the 20th century. We are reminded most notably of that lag (or resistance) by conservatives and liberals alike who are still trying to solve (or resolve) problems of the 20th century with

intellectual tool-kits from the 19th century. The social and cultural characteristics of the last two decades of the 20th century are light-years different from the social and cultural characteristics of the 19th century. Marxist formulas of the 1850's seem anachronistically fossil as we near the "rosy-fingered dawn" of the 21st century. Agrarian land solutions to contemporary social problems seem nostalgically skeletal in the context of accelerating technological change. The ideals of a pre-technological world are seen as dim as the Golden Age must have seemed to Hesiod.

The ordeal of change wreaks psychic havoc on those who resist the evolutionary flow of life and circumstance. The human condition cannot be assessed in terms of 19th century novels. The rugged individualism of the past has become a metaphor of another time. Those who sail the seas in single sloops are rarities in our time. To sail the stars requires a fleet of cooperation, technical crews and bonhommie.

The world has not been the same since 1957. Science and technology have created new realities, new horizons and new expectations. In 1900, the prospects for flight were barely apprehensible; in the year 2001, the prospects for space exploration loom large. Such social acceleration

requires immediate long-range planning. Our conceptual orientation must change from the past to the future. As Hugh Duncan put it: "Social Acts are now described as events that order themselves through a 'tendancy to self-maintenance.' Social systems are likened to solar systems and social roles are said to 'bring out' possibilities of behavior which fit the needs and tolerances of the particular 'patterned structure.' In this model of society, attitudes 'gear' and 'mesh' because 'patterned structure' and 'integrative patterns. . . bring it about that all statuses of the society intermesh like a series of interlocking wheels.' Communication of expressive symbols is not studied as an enactment of social order, but as a process of cathexis which meanings are 'attached' to objects and persons" (Communication and Social Order).

The Dimensions of the Future

Against this backdrop, what are the qualitative characteristics of the future for Chicanos?

It seems to me that our concerns for the year 2001 ought to gravitate around a nucleus of concepts which should address themselves to the problems of the future:

The Hispanic Diaspora and Coalition Politics

National visibility and national import for Chicanos may best be realized by identifying with the larger

Hispanic diaspora and by forging coalitions with other ethnic American groups.

Demographics of the Sunbelt

Shifting populations in the United States pose considerable peril to Chicano power in the sunbelt.

Research and Development

One such concept ought to flesh out a promotion of research and development activities by Chicanos. The Chicano network in Michigan is a prime example of the type of R & D work we ought to be involved in.

Policy Studies

A Chicano center for the study of public policy seems desperately wanting. We all know what little impact Chicanos have on public policy. Policies of all kinds which ultimately will affect our children and grandchildren are being formulated without Chicano input. A Chicano center for the study of public policy could alert us to those formulations.

Communications

The key to the future lies in communications. Until we establish our own communication system, we will be dependent—as always—on the communication media of the dominant society. We must publish high-circulation newspapers and journals. We must acquire radio and television stations which are not just Spanish-language oriented.

Why, for example, should a Chicano not be publisher of the Washington-Post or Express-News in the year 2001? Is that possibility at odds with our ideological aspirations?

Education and Training

So much of the future depends upon education and training that we must begin now to think about what kind of education and training will prepare us for the year 2001. Becoming teachers of Bilingual Education will prepare us for certain kinds of pedagogical roles which may be at odds with the future.

Language Interaction

At the root of problems which Chicanos face in American society lie complex attitudes of linguistic perspectives. American lexocentrism is a documented process. If the qualitative characteristics of the future for Chicanos are to be positive, a major task in promoting a philosophy of linguistic relativity will need to be undertaken. This is a task apart from the immediacies of bilingual education.

Institutions

The efficacy of building institutions—however parallel their function—is best realized by the activity of a National Forum of Hispanic Organizations.

In concert with other Hispanic organizations, LULAC, for example, is able to exert a greater degree of influence in the public sector. But a genuine grass-roots Hispanic organization with a national voice is still dimly perceived on the horizon.

Choices in the Arena

The dimensions of the future are certainly more complex and contoured than I have suggested in the preceding abbreviation. But the point I wish to make is the point that Alvin Toffler made in his book Future Shock: namely, that "the year 2001 is closer to us in time than the greater depression." Unfortunately our past keeps getting in the way of our future. Like their Anglo counterparts, many Chicano social scientists cannot conceptualize alternatives to communism or capitalism. The alternative to capitalism need not be marxism. And the alternative to marxism need not be anarchy.

We must step outside the orthodox framework of problem-solving in our search for solutions. The future is more than dogma, and it will take more than a breviary to help us become a functional part of it. To knock the future is to create a paradox of nostalgia and aspirations.

Our choices in the arena are finite: we can feign,

fight or fend. Life is not a film that we can run backwards or play over. We may indeed exterminate ourselves fiddling with the future. No one can say! But the future is still there to be contended and coped with. It will not go away. And it will be upon us sooner than we may realize. For the year 2001, Chicanos must develop a system of skills that will make them functional existents of that time. The challenge of the future requires from us a rational response.

It seems to me that the future, more than any time in the past, will require of Chicanos a collective effort if they are to preserve their legacy of language and culture for their progeny.